

1

CHAPTER 1

The Forty Yards You Did Not Lose to Age

The playing partner who never swings hard

You know the man. Every club has one. He is seventy-one, he walks nine holes with a pull cart, and his backswing looks like he is reaching for a jar on a high shelf. There is no grunt, no lunge, no shoes twisting in the turf. The ball leaves the face with a sound you would describe as polite.

And then you walk to the balls. His is forty yards past yours.

You beat him in every measurable way that should matter. You are twenty years younger. You are stronger. You swing at what feels like ninety-five per cent of everything you own. You bought a driver last spring with a shaft that cost more than your first set of irons. None of it shows up on the ground.

> The forty yards between you and that man is not a strength gap. It is an ordering gap. His body arrives at the ball in sequence. Yours arrives all at once.

I have been that younger man. Some years ago I played a round with a retired schoolteacher at a nine-hole municipal track near my home, and I spent the back nine quietly furious. I hit two drives that felt enormous and finished short of his lazy little fade. On the walk to the car I asked him what he was doing. He said, "I let the club get to the top before I start down." I thought it was a throwaway line. It turned out to be the whole book, though it took me Japan to see it.

What actually left your swing between forty and fifty-five

Something did leave. Let us be honest about that first, because a book that tells you nothing changed after fifty is a book that will waste your Saturdays.

Older golfers, on the whole, hit the driver shorter than younger ones. You do not need a chart to know it; you can see it on any first tee. That is a real decline and no amount of rhythm erases all of it.

But look at how that decline happens. It is slow, and it is spread across decades. You did not live five decades between forty and fifty-five; you lived fifteen years. If you have lost forty yards in fifteen years, I do not believe age accounts for all of it. Something else took the rest.

Here is the thought that should stop you. Think of what you have bought in the last eight years: lighter shafts, bigger faces, adjustable weights, a launch-monitor fitting or two. If equipment were the answer, your forty yards would be back by now.

That is not a story about clubs failing. It is, I believe, a story about the thing that limits your distance sitting somewhere that equipment cannot reach.

What actually left your swing is smaller and more specific than "youth". You have probably lost some thoracic rotation, the turning range in your upper back, and we will check what yours looks like later in the book. You have likely lost a little elasticity. And crucially, you lost **the interval** — the tiny stretch of time, as your hands feel it, between the backswing finishing and the downswing starting. I do not believe that interval has to decline with age. In my experience it gets squeezed out by anxiety, and anxiety arrived the year you started losing distance and decided to do something about it.

Why your effort went up while your ball speed went down

Call it **the Effort Tax**. The harder you swing, the earlier you start down, and the earlier you start down, the less of your body is available to deliver speed at the ball.

The mechanism is not mysterious. A golf swing produces speed by unloading in order: ground, hips, torso, arms, hands, clubhead. Each link accelerates and then hands off. When you try harder, the parts you can consciously feel — your hands, your arms, your shoulders — fire first, because those are the muscles you have direct access to. The clubhead reaches its maximum speed somewhere out behind the ball, and by impact it is already slowing down.

Put plainly, the way I have come to see it:

> Uncock your wrists and get the clubhead going fast before your lower body does anything, and you have killed your speed.

A speed killer. Not a shape problem, not an accuracy problem. The thing that feels like maximum effort is the thing draining your yards.

I think this is why the seventy-one-year-old wins. He stopped trying to hit it hard a long time ago, so nothing hurries his top. He swings in order by default, and in my experience order beats force.

When I first timed my own swing, the downswing started sooner than I believed.

That gap between what you believe your swing does and what it actually does is where your forty yards are living.



Face-on, right-handed. Left: the hands start down while the hips are still back. Right: the top has finished and the front heel presses first.

What this book will and will not ask of you

Let us set the terms now, so you can stop bracing.

This book will not ask you to join a gym. It will not ask you to buy a driver, a launch monitor, or a subscription. It will not rebuild your swing, because you have already paid three professionals to do that and you are still reading books about distance.

What it will ask for is **ten minutes a night, without a ball.** That, and the range balls you would buy anyway, is the cost. The method comes from a practice tradition called *suburi*, the Japanese term for repetitive practice swings, used in martial arts such as kendo and iaido as well as in bat-and-club sports including baseball and golf[1]. In kendo, it is one of the basic drills. We will look properly at why swinging with no target trains something that hitting balls cannot.

And it will ask you to accept a target that is honest. If you are a fourteen-handicap man in your fifties currently carrying the driver somewhere short of 200, the realistic prize here is not 300 yards. It is a carry number you have measured yourself, and strikes that come off the middle. How far that number moves, I cannot tell you. Nobody honestly can.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Stop attributing the whole forty yards to age: I do not believe age takes that much, that fast.
- Stop expecting equipment to solve it: you have already tried that, more than once.
- Name your real enemy the Effort Tax: extra force makes your hands start before your ground does, and that order costs speed at impact.
- Commit to ten minutes a night with no ball, in the pattern of daily suburi, before you book another lesson or hit another bucket.
- Write down, tonight, what you honestly believe you carry with a driver. You will test that number in the next chapter and it will probably be wrong.

Which raises the uncomfortable question. If your swing has been leaking yards for fifteen years, why has nobody told you where the leak is? The answer is that your ball has been telling you every weekend, in a language nobody taught you to read. So what exactly is that high, weak, wounded-bird fade trying to say?

Notes to this chapter

[1] **Suburi.** Wikipedia, “Suburi”: a Japanese word for practice swings, used in martial arts such as kendo and in sports including baseball and golf.

Everything else in this chapter is my own view and practical advice, not a study. “I” is a character, as the book’s title page explains.

This is Chapter 1 of Get Your Yards Back, Vol. I of The Complete Tempo System, by Park Golf. The full book goes on from here: Chapter 2 reads the wounded bird, and every chapter after it gives you one thing to do tonight.